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AUTHOR Brooks, Loren E.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to replicate and extend previous research, the Community Oriented Programs Environment Scale (COPES) was administered over a two-year period to youths residing at Boys Town. Each administration provided further replication for the previous one. The youths lived in "family-style" homes with Family-Teachers. The results of the study were threefold. Firstly, satisfaction with global environment related minimally to a specific environment's social climate. Secondly, satisfaction with a specific environment positively related to all relationship dimensions, as well as to the amount of autonomy, order and organization, and program clarity encouraged in the environment. While these results replicated findings reported previously in other environments, a positive relationship between personal problem orientation and satisfaction with a specific environment was not consistently replicated. Other consistent relationships found between satisfaction with the specific environment and that enviornment's social climate included a positive relationship with practical orientation and a negative relationship with anger and aggression. Finally, social climate did not consistently correlate with any respondent background variables tested, although the number of months the youths lived with their Family-Teachers related to many social climate variables in one administration. Appended tables support these findings. Implications for youth care are discussed. (Author)

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ENVIRONMENTAL CORRELATES IN YOUTH CARE[1]

By

Loren E. Brooks

Dean L. Fixsen

Dennis M. Maloney

Karen B. Maloney

THE BOYS TOWN CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

and

THE DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH CARE

FATHER FLANAGAN'S BOYS' HOME

BOYS TOWN, NEBRASKA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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ENVIRONMENTAL CORRELATES IN YOUTH CARE

The measurement of social climate has received considerable attention from community psychologists. The purpose of such assessment is to determine what types of social environments make the best living situations and, therefore, positively influence human behavior. These environmental influences are so important that factors promoting healthy social environments need to be identified. For example, in a youth care facility one would want to determine what factors promote an environment that is humane and satisfying to its participant, yet at the same time, it is equally important to determine the types of environments that promote program effectiveness (Phillips, 1977).

The effects of a positive environment have been reported in a number of studies. People who work in a pressure oriented environment tend to develop peptic ulcers quicker than controls (Cobb & Rose, 1973). Another study has indicated that in a number of community-based group homes, program participant satisfaction negatively correlated with the number of police and court contacts the participants had while in the program. Also, it has been shown in still another study that social climate effected the rates of absconding from community-based treatment program for youths (Chase, 1974). Finally, relationships have been shown to exist between social stimuli and physical health (Kiritiz & Moos, 1974).

Much of the work in measuring social climate has been conducted by Rudolph Moos and his colleagues, who have developed scales that assess the social climate of human service environments (Moos, 1974, 1975). These scales attempt to assess such social environmental dimensions as relationships, personal development, and systems maintenance. One area of

inquiry Moos has been investigating concerns determining which aspects of social climate promote a satisfying environment and under what conditions these dimensions are relevant.

The purpose of the present study was twofold. One goal was to attempt a systematic replication (Sidman, 1960) of the relationships previously found between social climate and various other related variables in hospital wards, community-based programs (Moos, 1974), and classrooms (Trickett & Moos, 1974). Secondly, efforts were made to identify new variables that also may relate to social climate. If these replications and extensions were to prove true, implications would be provided to program developers for designing and implementing social service programs.

Method

Setting. The setting for the study was Boys Town, a midwestern youth care facility for adolescent males. During the study the institution's youth care program was in the process of being converted from a traditional medical model to the Teaching-Family Model (Evans, Dowd, Schneider, Wallace, Fixsen, & Phillips, 1976). This program was developed to provide quality youth care in community-based group homes for youths in trouble (Wolf, Phillips, Fixsen, Braukmann, Kirigin, Willner, & Schumaker, 1976; Fixsen, Wolf, & Phillips, 1974; Phillips, Phillips, Fixsen, & Wolf, 1972). The Model, as it was applied to the institution, included setting up "family-style" homes on campus. The homes were staffed by a trained live-in married couple referred to as Family-Teachers and an assistant.

Population. The youths involved in the study were assigned to the homes on a space available basis. Their length of stay varied from a few weeks to

until graduation from high school. Their ages ranged from 9 to 19. On the average they were academically behind two years upon arriving at Boys Town. The number of youths participating in the study ranged from 266 to 321.

Assessment. The measures were adminisitered four times over a two year period with all of the available youths that were willing to participate in the study. The number of operational homes on campus during the study ranged from 36 to 41. The measures were administered under a relatively tight protocol which is reported elsewhere (Brooks, Fixsen, Maloney, & Maloney, 1978). The measures that were utilized included the Community Oriented Programs Environment Scale (COPES), satisfaction questions, and demographic data.

COPES questionnaire. The COPES questionnaire consisted of 100 true-false items that were aggregated to form ten subscales (Moos, 1974). These subscales further divided into three broad dimensions of social climate; a relationship dimension which included measures of Involvement, Support, and Spontaneity; a treatment program dimension which included measures of Autonomy, Personal Problem Orientation, Practical Orientation, and Anger and Agression; and a system maintenance dimension which included measures of Order and Organization, Program Clarity, and Staff Control.

Satisfaction questions. For the first administration the satisfaction question referred to the general environment (i.e., How satisfied are you with your life at Boys Town?). It was revised for subsequent administrations to refer to the specific environment (i.e., How satisfied are you with your life in your home?). Both satisfaction questions were scaled using a Likert-type bipolar seven point scale.

Demographic data. There were three types of demographic data collected. First, the age of each youth was collected from an institutional record. It was recorded in years. Next, the length of stay at Boys Town of each youth was gathered from the same institutional record. It was recorded in months at Boys Town. Finally, the amount of time the youths had resided with their Family-Teachers was collected via self report from the youths. As with length of stay, it was recorded in months.

Results

Satisfaction. Spearman rank-order correlations were computed between the mean social climate subscale scores for each home and the mean home scores for the satisfaction questions. Table 1 shows a previous study that suggested a significant relationship did not exist between a global environment (i.e., a school) and a specific environment's (i.e., a classroom) social climate (Trickett & Moos, 1974). However, these results were from a different type of environment and used a different scale than the present study. Therefore, all of the dimensions tested by the COPES had not been assessed. Nevertheless, the present study essentially replicated the findings with the exception of Involvement and Practical Orientation as shown in Table 2.

Table 3 shows previous findings in regard to correlations between satisfaction with a specific environment and that environment's social climate. Using only relatively strong correlations that were reported in each attempt to relate the two measures, the results indicate that all of the relationship dimension, Autonomy, Personal Problem Orientation, Order and Organization, and Program Clarity all positively related to specific environmental satisfaction. Practical Orientation, Anger and Aggression,

and Staff Control failed to strongly correlate with specific environmental satisfaction in at least one study.

In the present study satisfaction with a specific environment (i.e., with life in the home) positively related to a number of social climate subscales. In order to be considered the variable had to correlate beyond the .01 level in each administration. Table 4 indicates that all of the relationship dimensions, as well as Autonomy and Practical Orientation in the treatment program dimension met the criteria with positive correlations. The systems maintenance dimension also had Order and Organization and Program Clarity that fulfilled these requirements. Anger and Aggression was consistently correlated negatively with the specific environment satisfaction question.

Demographic Data

Pearson product-moment correlations were computed between the individual youth's demographic data and individual social climate subscale scores. Again, in order for a relationship to be considered, the correlation had to be significant beyond the .01 level over each administration.

Table 5, Table 6, and Table 7 all show that there were no consistent significant correlations between the demographic variables tested and the social climate subscales. There were a number of significant correlations between length of association with Family-Teacher and social climate in one administration. This was not replicated in the next administration.

Discussion

The results of the present study provide confirmation that perceptions of social climate do not tend to relate to background characteristics, such

as age or length of stay. A number of significant correlations between number of months with Family-Teachers and social climate variables were found in one administration, but not in the other. One may speculate what such discrepancy is attributed to, however, it will take further investigation before more concrete statements can be made. It would seem reasonable, though, that if concepts like interpersonal relationships are an aspect of the social environment that evolve as people become more accustomed to one another, length of association should be a significant correlate.

The results of the study also confirm that a relationship exists between aspects of an environment's social climate and participants' satisfaction with that environment. Of particular importance in many satisfying environments is an emphasis on positive interpersonal relationships, along with a feeling of self-sufficiency or independence, a degree of order and organization and knowing what to expect in the environment. Environmental characteristics, such as emphasis on preparation for the future or reduction of anger and aggression seem to be important for satisfying youth care environments like Boys Town, but may not be as important in other settings.

Much evidence has been provided by previous studies suggesting the importance of satisfying social environments. The present study provides evidence regarding dimensions that promote these satisfying environments in youth care programs. It would next appear to be one task of community psychologists involved with youth care to develop techniques designed to improve the social climate of a milieu along these various dimensions. This possibly should be followed by the development and dissemination of materials designed to train youth care staff to implement these techniques.

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Footnotes

Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Loren E. Brooks, Associate Researcher, The Boys Town Center for the Study of Youth Development, Boys Town, Nebraska 68010.

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TABLE 1. Correlational findings reported in previous study between satisfaction with a global environment and a specfic environment's social climate.

	Classrooms (Trickett & Moos, 1974)	
Subscale	direction	strength
Involvement	+	
Support	0	
Spontaneity	NA	NA
Autonomy	NA	NA
Prac. Orien.	NA	NA
Pers. Prob. Or.	NA	NA
Anger & Aggres.	NA	NA
Order & Organ.	-	
Prog. Clarity	-	
Staff Control	-	

Direction:
+ = Positive r reported
- = Negative r reported
= Zero r reported

Strength:
** = Strong siginficant r
* = Relatively strong non-significant r

NA = Information not available

TABLE 2. Rank-order correlations over Boys Town homes between satisfaction with a general environment (i.e., campus) and a specific environment's (i.e., homes) social climate.

Subscales	time 1
Involvement	.50 *
Support	.31
Spontaneity	.14
Autonomy	.34
Prac. Orien.	.59 **
Pers. Prob. Or.	.14
Anger & Aggres.	-.25
Order & Organ.	.25
Prog. Clarity	.42 *
Staff Control	-.19
	n = 36

** p<.001
* p<.01

TABLE 3. Correlational findings reported in previous studies between satisfaction with an environment and perceptions of that environment's social climate.

	Classrooms (Trickett & Moos, 1974)		Wards (Moos, 1974)		Community-based programs (Moos, 1974)	
Subscale	direction	strength	direction	strength	direction	strength
Involvement	+	**	+	**	+	**
Support	+	**	NA	NA	+	**
Spontaneity	NA	NA	NA	NA	+	**
Autonomy	NA	NA	+	**	+	*
Prac. Orien.	NA	NA	+	**	0	
Pers. Prob. Or.	NA	NA	+	**	+	**
Anger & Aggres.	NA	NA	−		0	
Order & Organ.	+	*	+	**	+	*
Prog. Clarity	+	**	+	*	+	*
Staff Control	−		−	*	−	*

Direction: + = Positive r reported
− = Negative r reported
0 = Zero r reported

Strength: ** = Strong significant r
* = Relatively strong non-significant r

NA = Information not available

TABLE 4. Rank-order correlations over Boys Town homes in three time periods between youths' satisfaction with life in home and youths' perceptions of their homes' social climate.

Subscale	time 2	time 3	time 4
Involvement	.66**	.71 **	.84 **
Support	.67 **	.67 **	.84 **
Spontaneity	.42 *	.42 *	.67 **
Autonomy	.53 **	.48 **	.72 **
Prac. Orien.	.41 *	.53 **	.62 **
Pers. Prob. Or.	.39 *	.58 **	.35
Anger & Aggres.	-.58 **	-.45 *	-.58 **
Order & Organ.	.57 **	.52 **	.71 **
Prog. Clarity	.62 **	.74 **	.66 **
Staff Control	-.16	-.02	-.14
	n = 41	n = 40	n = 41

** p<.001
* p<.01

TABLE 5. Pearson r correlations between youths' age and perceptions of their social climate.

Subscale	time 1	time 2	time 3	time 4
Involvement	.05	.05	.03	.04
Support	.20 **	.09	.08	.10
Spontaneity	.28 **	.12	.16 *	.15 *
Autonomy	.16 *	.06	.17 *	.11
Prac. Orien.	.10	.02	.13	.03
Pers. Prob. Or.	.05	.03	-.06	-.03
Anger & Aggres.	-.17 *	-.02	-.08	-.08
Order & Organ.	.23 **	.11	.09	.08
Prog. Clarity	.13	.05	.16 *	.14 *
Staff Control	-.03	.01	.06	.02
	n = 269	n = 263	n = 295	n = 299

** p<.001
* p<.01

TABLE 6. Pearson r correlations between months on campus and youths' perceptions of their homes' social climate.

Subscale	time 1	time 2	time 3	time 4
Involvement	.00	.00	.03	.11
Support	.12	.02	-.01	.07
Spontaneity	.13	.02	.13	.17 **
Autonomy	.19 **	.14	.13	.16 *
Prac. Orien.	.08	.03	.06	.05
Pers. Prob. Or.	-.05	.04	.02	-.08
Anger & Aggres.	-.01	.03	-.03	-.04
Order & Organ.	-.05	-.06	-.01	.07
Prog. Clarity	.04	.08	.01	.16 *
Staff Control	-.10	.00	.00	.09
	n = 265	n = 261	n = 296	n = 309

** p<.001
* p<.01

TABLE 7. Pearson r correlations between months resided with Family-Teachers and youths' perceptions of their homes' social climate.

Subscale	time 3	time 4
Involvement	.23 **	.05
Support	.21 **	.05
Spontaneity	.26 **	.13
Autonomy	.16 *	.08
Prac. Orien.	.18 **	.05
Pers. Prob. Or.	.14 *	-.11
Anger & Aggres.	-.27 **	.04
Order & Organ.	.16 *	-.05
Prog. Clarity	.20 **	.08
Staff Control	.06	-.03
	n = 298	n = 311

** p<.001
* p<.01